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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

DYE IMAGERY

By

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PERSONAL STATEMENT ABOUT PERCEPTION

The artist considers perception not merely a physiological act but a psychological experience. The times when the artist is most creative, which she terms isolated periods of vision--visions of feeling a new level of one's being, are the instances when she produces her strongest work.

The process first involves seeing an object or image, and second finding its secret meaning for the artist. The artist's work is the embodiment of the latter step, regardless of the medium or process employed. This secret meaning goes beyond the truth of appearances. Certainly other artists work with this same notion of secret meaning; they only express it in different manner. Picasso often referred to this subject but he implied that reality is more than the thing itself.

The artist's work involves this reorganization of reality by means of several types of transformation, although they are not employed simultaneously. The basic kinds of transformation that she uses to express this secret meaning are symbolic, graphic, structural, or expressionistic in nature. The initial act of seeing becomes subjectively internalized, then the artist assimilates and transforms the world that surrounds her.

Often to the viewer it may appear that the artist's works are merely reproductions of reality. To some viewers the works are "ready made", or perhaps she is removing fragments of something from their context. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of the artist that she is constantly inventing and forming a new reality for herself and others to perceive. For example, the artist employs the format of the window in

some of her pieces. Through this creation she shapes and enables other individual's perceptions of the window and its connotations.

It is the artist's view that by fusing the physical and the psychological facets of perception, a work of art is created. This insertion and blending of the artist's personal self becomes inscribed in space, as both an image and an object, sometimes perceptible to others. These works of art are made of materials from everyday life yet they reflect images born of sight and memory and depict the world transformed. The artist considers that her works are, therefore, not pure ornament or fanciful additions to reality, but fragments of her inner being and self.

WINDOWS

It is perfectly possible in my work to see, say, windows, or to see a wave breaking in the sea, or to see a teddy bear, if you want, or the sky; but that's not the "real" subject matter. . . . You don't have to paint a figure in order to express human feelings. . . . The game is not what things "look like." The game is organizing as accurately and with as deep discrimination as one can, states of feeling; and states of feeling, when generalizing, become questions of light, color, weight, solidity, airiness, lyricism, sombreness, heaviness, strength, whatever. . . .¹

Robert Motherwell, Tracks: A Journal of Artists' Writings

The artist enjoys the concept of windows because of the duality of the connections implied. The window divides the space between the inside and the outside. This division creates a private sheltered environment within the context of architecture. One may chose this hidden environment or one may open the window covering to look out and experience the world outside. The artist is interested in these contradictions and interrelationships. The artist's thesis works are concerned with space and spatial illusions. She is concerned with the effects of light and shadow within the framework of a window/screen concept. The artist is intrigued with how the crossbars of a windows seem to fracture the scene that one is viewing, either looking out a window or looking in.

When the artist travels she often compares how the various window elements change from one geographic area to the next. She also notices while traveling by train that the villages and towns appear to move within the fixed frame, as each successive town or area projects its own particular inherent design and symmetry.

WINDOWS/ARCHITECTURE

The early twentieth century saw the development of the so-called International Style, as exemplified by the works of Gropius, Mies Van Der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Oud Dudok, and others. An interesting feature of the work of Oud is the affinity of his facades with the paintings of Mondrian; the windows are not holes in the walls but are integral with the elemental planes of the elevations. This concept was carried to its dramatic conclusion in the Bauhaus workshop block by Gropius, where the wall and the window are synonymous.²

Often, I used to gloat over the beautiful buildings I could build only if it were unnecessary to cut windows into them.³

Frank Lloyd Wright

The artist contends that Frank Lloyd Wright was more interested in pandering to his aesthetic prejudices than in providing suitable shelter for the inhabitants of his buildings. Since Wright's day there have been many changes in architecture. This artist is particularly interested in the Modernist and Post-Modernist movements in architecture, and especially in their consideration of the window as synonymous with the wall.

Throughout history windows have been a headache for architects. Historically from references found in Canaanite mythology, as well as in the East, Near, Middle and Far- the window conflict has spawned a variety of solutions to creating a wall opening. Each culture has been able to devise unique forms of screens, shutters, blinds and curtains, as a way of keeping the inhabitant of an architectural space in touch with the outer world, yet affording some privacy from it.

WINDOWS/DESIGN

The artist's awareness of the windows around her continues to influence her work. She can watch the quality of light, patterns of clouds and snowflakes, as well as other changing weather phenomenon move by. The artist enjoys this contradiction between the stable, static architectural nature of the windows, and the outside--nature constantly in a state of flux. The artist often likes to transfer part of this contrast of opposites to her work. This contrast may be seen in the selection of materials, color movements, or textures she employs. This format of the window has been the artist's vehicle for creative expression for this body of work. In the future, architecture will continue to be a source of inspiration, although the way in which the influence manifests itself will undoubtedly change.

VISUAL/VERBAL LANGUAGE DICHOTOMY

The artist's undergraduate degree is a B.A. in French Literature and Art History. For four years she was primarily concerned with establishing a competent vocabulary, in both a foreign language and in English, in which to express herself and communicate these ideas.

Ironically, as the artist nears completion of the M.F.A. degree program she feels that a level of mastery in communication of a different means has been achieved. The emphasis has switched from using a verbal/linguistic form of communication to an aesthetic/visual language.

The artist considers herself to be a voracious observer, and often these observations have been communicated in words. The importance of words as a means of communication has become less predominant; the artist now has acquired a method of expressing herself which involves other skills. The artist's observations and feelings are now expressed to an audience through such variables as line, color, texture, form, intensity, and proportion.

As an individual the artist has found immense satisfaction in being able to express herself with new materials and processes. Instead of employing nouns, verbs, and adjectives as the building blocks to create a message, the artist now focuses her energy on transforming fabric, thread, paper, and the like into an aesthetic message for herself and others to experience.

GRID PROGRESSION

This piece was conceived and completed during the month of October 1983, the thesis work was officially started in December 1983. It is an important piece because although it is not actually considered part of the thesis body of work, it was the beginning of the artist's use of the window/screen concept, as well as the use of painting with dyes directly on the warp ends.

The piece is composed of a warp of rayon, linen and cotton. Structurally the woven ground is a combination of plain, twill, and rep weaves. Each one-half-inch wide horizontal gray twill band has been folded and machine-stitched after weaving, to create a casement, into which a metal tube has been inserted, thereby concealing the tube. These tubes give a more three-dimensional effect to the piece, and thus, the artist's interest in creating spatial illusions began. She also became interested the shadows that are cast by the components of a piece, and to consider their potential effects as design elements, as well as their role as an integral part of the total statement.

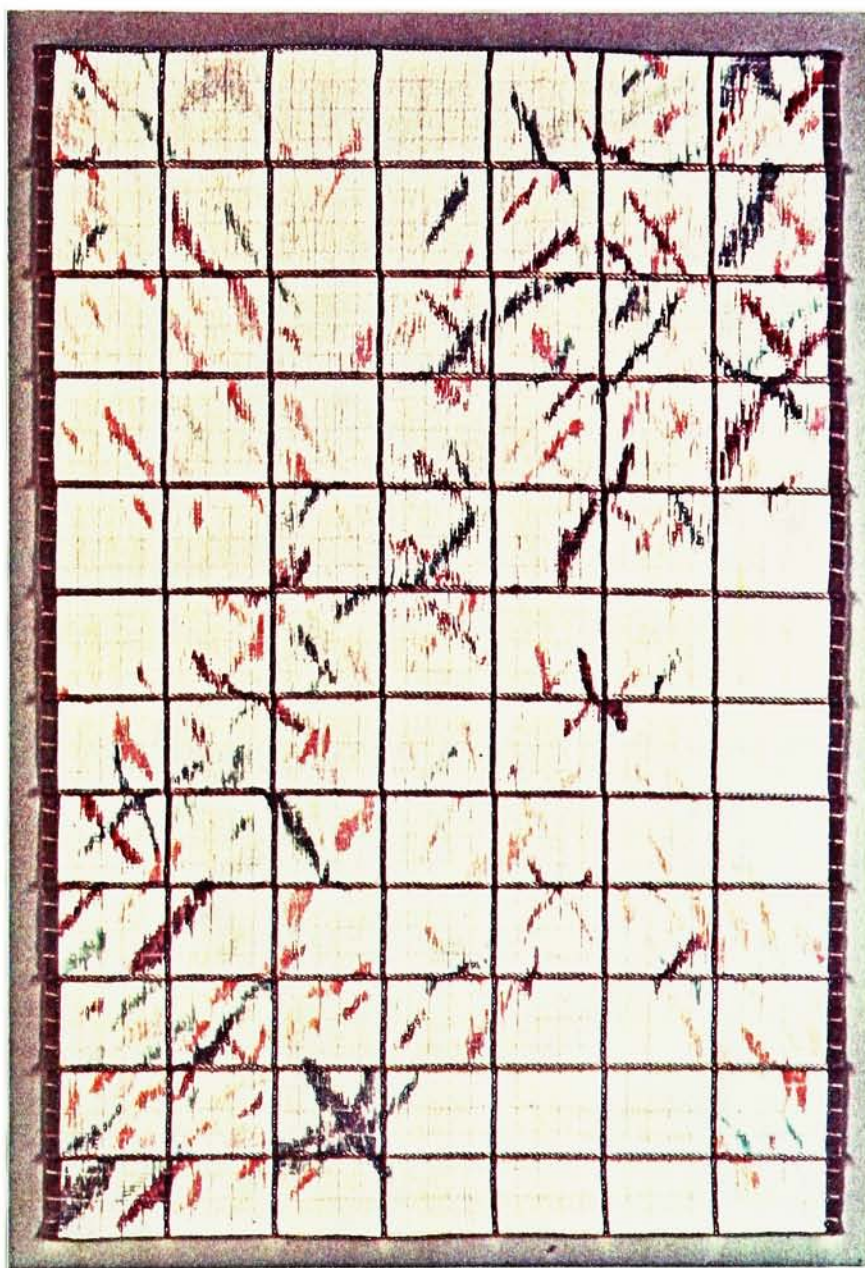


Fig. 1. Grid Progression

INDIVIDUAL THESIS PIECES

Fenêtre à la Chinoise

In this piece the artist used a warp of silk and rayon, with linen stripes to form a grid element. After weaving the fabric the artist felt the grid design did not project strongly enough; therefore, a system of warp face tapes was woven and stitched onto the primary surface. The decision was made to stretch the woven fabric and tapes over a frame because under tension one could better perceive the subtle transitions in the warp fibers.

This first completed thesis piece is actually the largest of all six pieces. It is an important piece because it represents the culmination of the artist's efforts to combine the calligraphic marks painted directly on the warp threads with dye, with the more formal crossing grid elements.

Overall this piece works to create an illusion of spatial dimension, casting a play of shadows which are established between the woven stripes and the painted tapes.

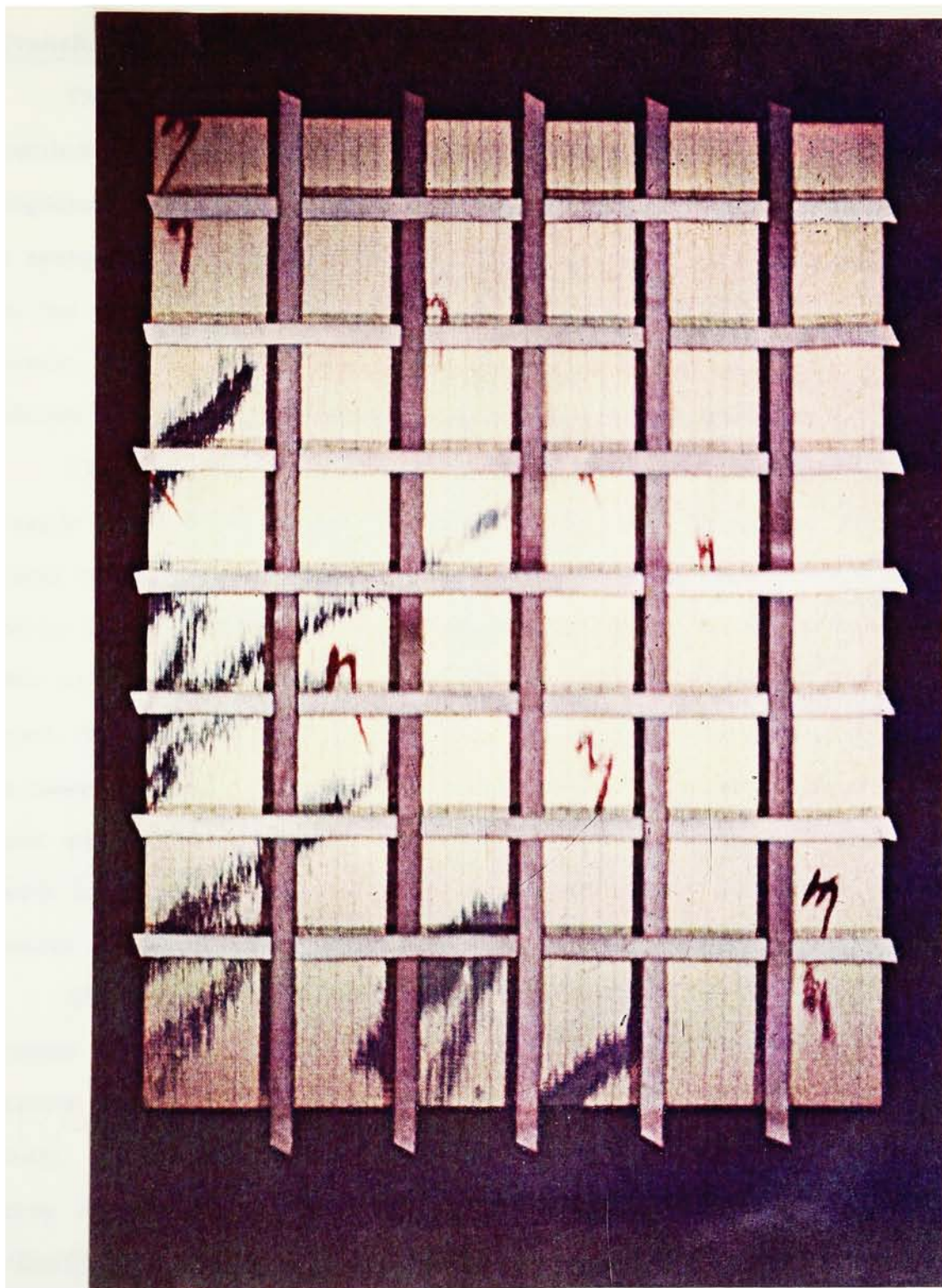


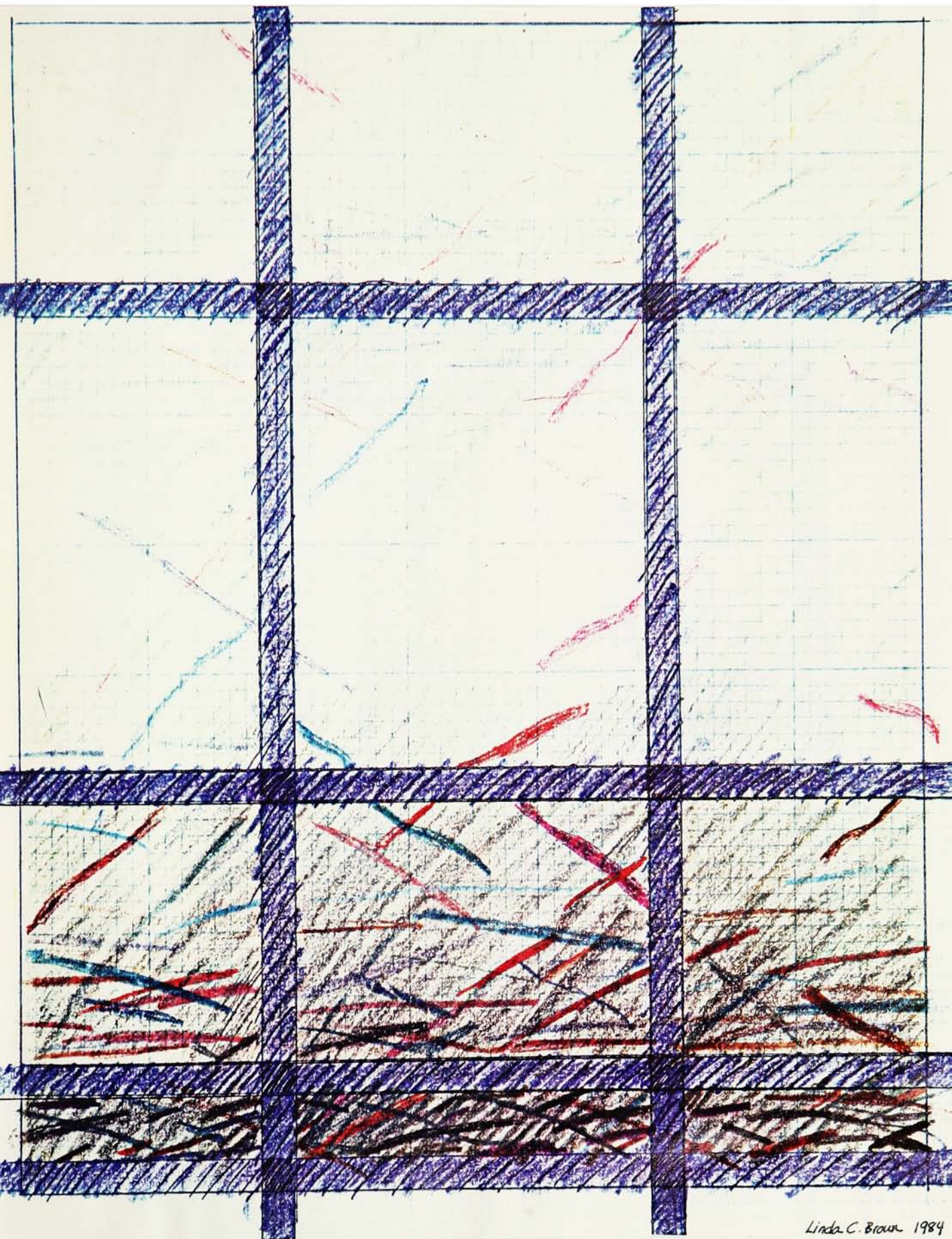
Fig. 2. Fenêtre à la Chinoise

Transformation/Progression

The artist employed a warp of silk and linen fibers which was painted with dyes in a gradation, before dressing the loom. She employed strips of painted china silk and dyed rayon ribbons to create a textural/color movement across a woven ground. The darker values in the warp correspond to the darkest values in the ribbons and fabric strips. The artist worked to create another type of textural, spatial illusion through the use of an actual latticework of painted wood.

The artist is concerned with relating the drawings she designs to textile processes (see figs. 3 and 4). She wants to capture the gestural motions of the pencil or paint and translate them in fiber. In terms of the process involved in creating this piece the artist feels that she was able to capture the linear aspects of her drawing by employing each ribbon or fabric strip as a line. She was thereby "drawing" with a piece of ribbon to create the overall image. Technically the ribbons and strips of fabric become supplemental wefts, as there is a continuous weft of blue linen that actually weaves under and over in the plain weave ground fabric.

This piece the artist feels is the most complete statement of the thesis work. It is technically well executed, and the design of the woven surface and the lattice element compliment each other successfully. By actually suspending the latticework in space the shadows they cast make an important connection between the woven ground and "floating screen".



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Fig. 3. Drawing for Transformation/Progression

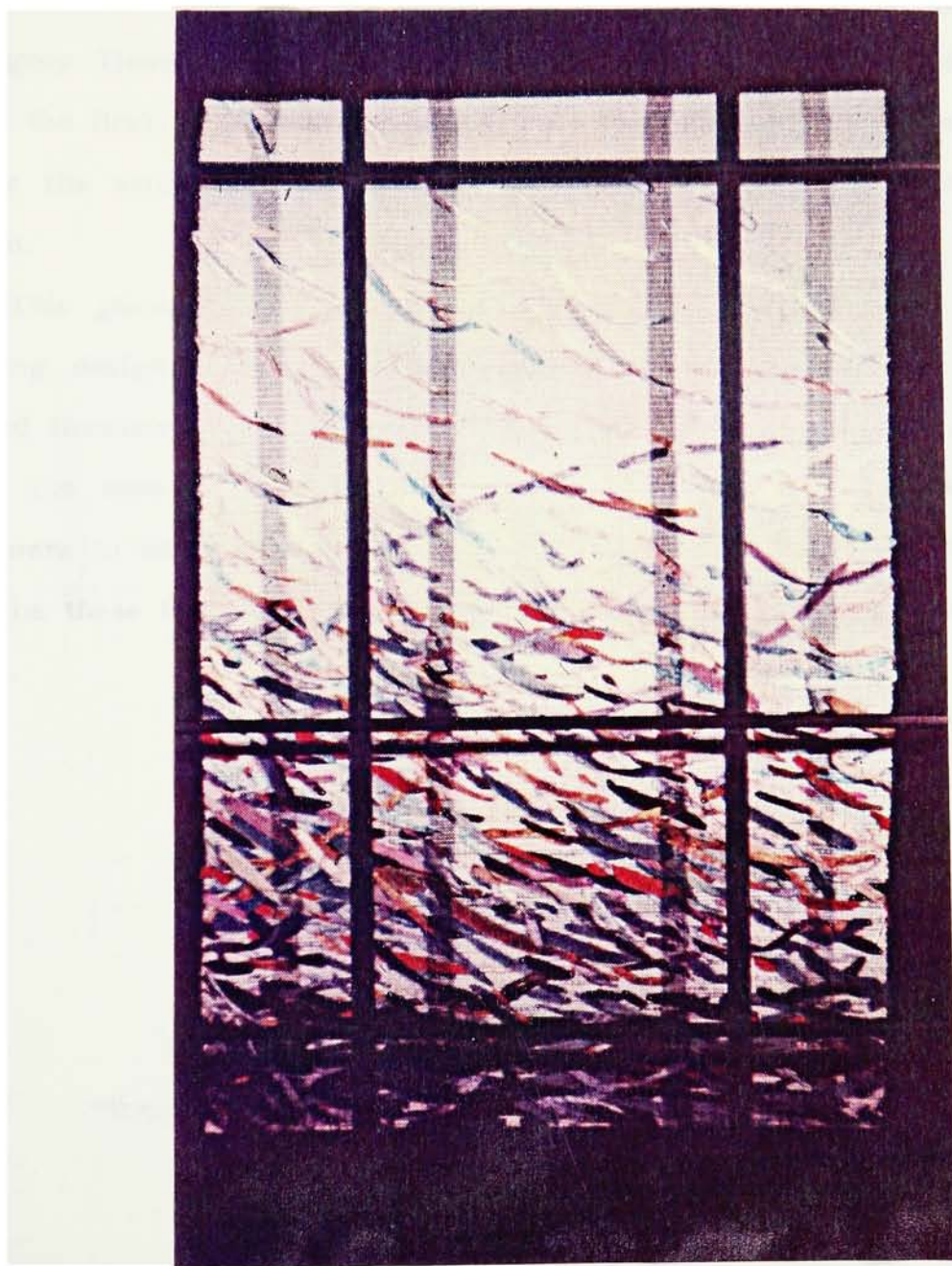


Fig. 4. Transformation/Progression

Post-Modern Blues

This piece is composed of doublewoven fabric. Technically this comprises two layers of fabric woven simultaneously; in this case first two picks from the top layer were woven, and then two picks from the bottom layer. One warp is painted in a gradation in value with a blue/grey Tincoton dye solution. The second warp, which is underneath the first, is a natural cotton color. By interchanging these two layers the artist had two different surfaces to incorporate into the design.

This piece relates to the artist's interest in architecture and clothing design. The Post-Modernists such as Michael Graves, concerned themselves with decorating the surfaces of their buildings. In much the same way clothing can become a surface and vehicle for designers to embellish. It was the artist's concept to perhaps subtly combine these two ideas in a unified piece consisting of three modular units.

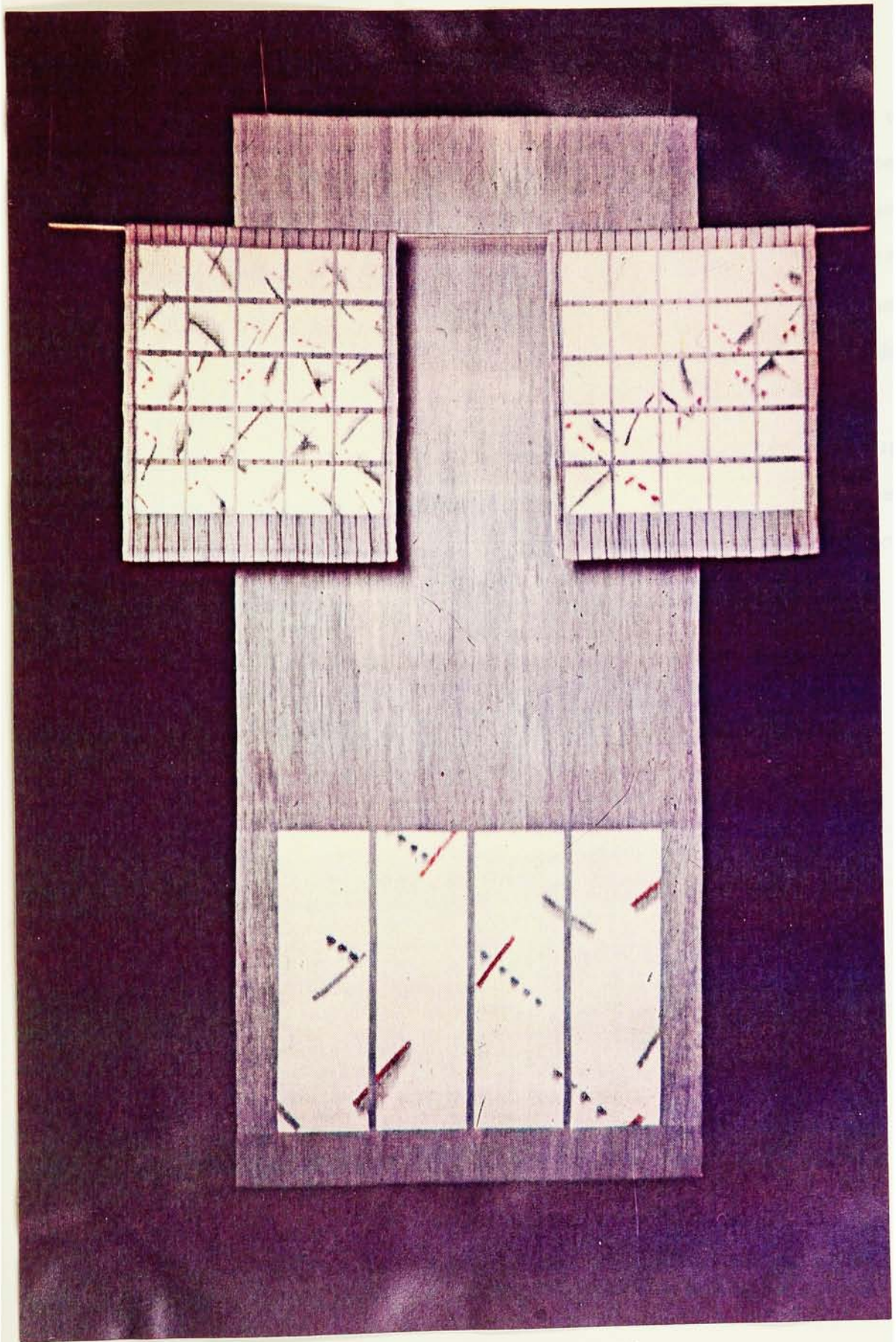


Fig. 5. Post Modern Blues

Untitled

This piece is also a doublewoven fabric. The two layers consist of one warp made of silk and linen yarns wound together, and painted with dyes in a color gradation. The second layer is made of black cotton yarns, which are visible only in the small window element in the top center of the piece. The artist wanted to combine the ribbon and fabric strips that were used in Transformation/Progression and employ them on a different scale.

The artist enjoys the simplicity of this fiber statement although she sees that perhaps in future pieces created along these same lines, other variables could be included to add complexity to the initial concept.

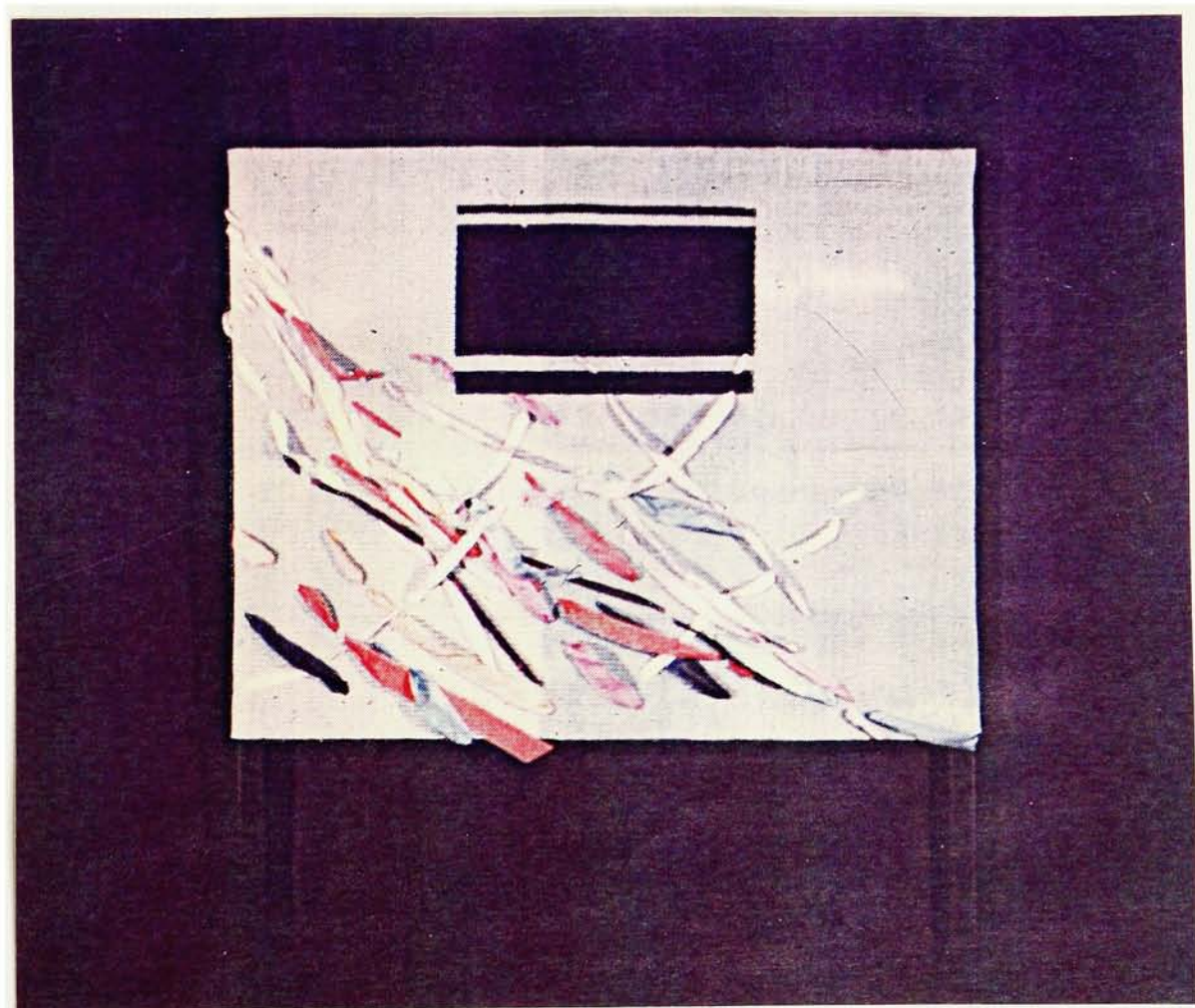


Fig. 6. Untitled

Skyline Series II

This piece incorporates the technique of doubleweave although the artist changed the type of imagery. Besides the change in imagery there is also a rather dramatic change in scale. This piece is the smallest of all six thesis pieces. The artist became intrigued with manipulating the two layers of fabric and began to expose them, thus making the process of weaving more apparent in the final presentation of the piece.

The artist makes some direct references to architecture in this woven statement. Instead of focusing purely on a fenestration/grid concept the planes of the buildings themselves become the surfaces to be embellished. There is an allusion to the way in which some Post-Modern architects treat the surfaces of the buildings they design with colors and patterns not typically associated with architecture. There is also a reference made to the architectural renderings of several architects, such as George Ranalli, Michael Graves, and Diana Agrest. The artist's admiration for these architects and especially for their sensitive and innovative ways of conveying architecture on paper have influenced her designs.

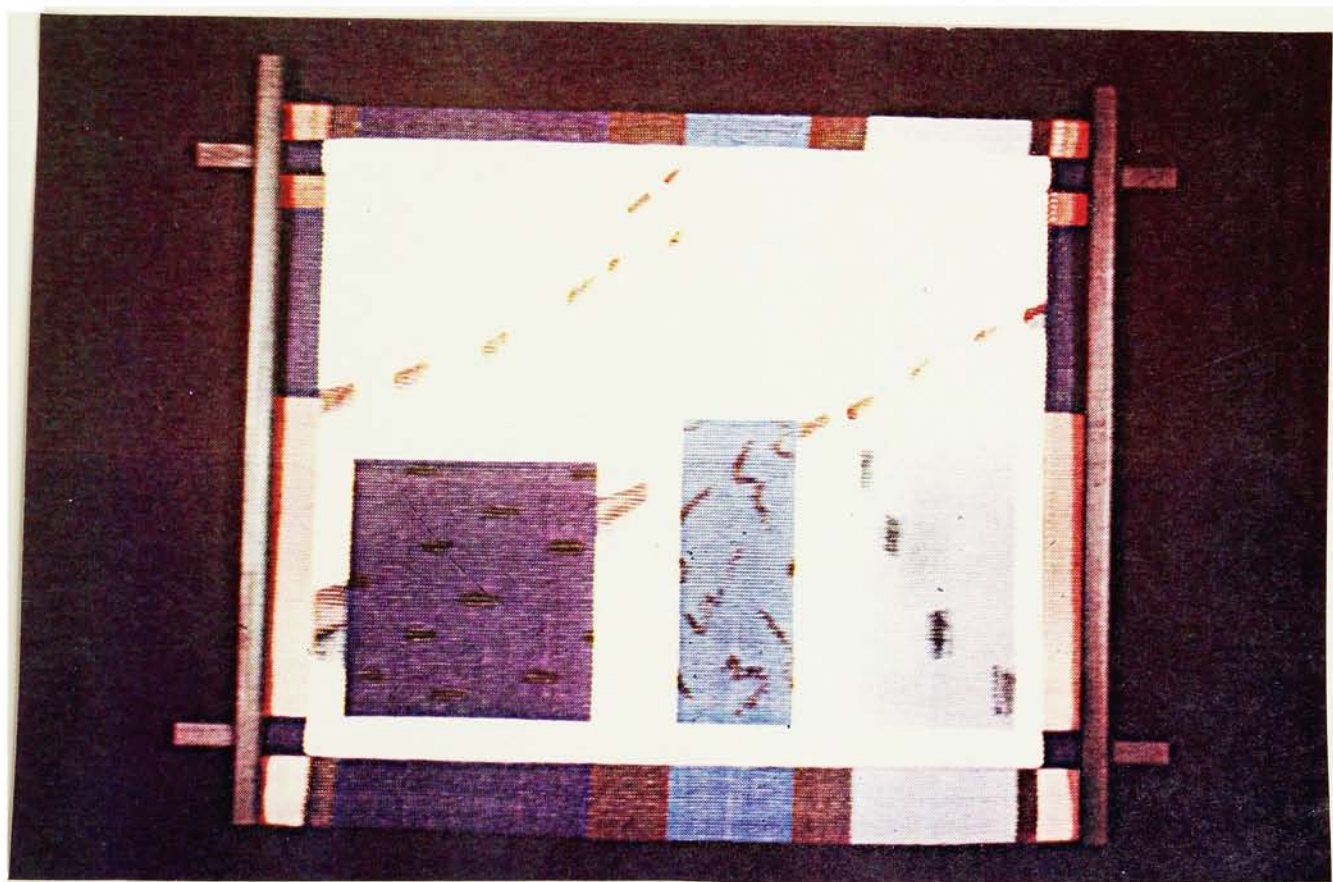


Fig. 7. Skyline Series II

Foreign Language Series

The artist thoroughly enjoys the elements of collage, and the freedom of working so directly with the materials. She hopes to consider this piece the start of a series of drawings relating to the themes of architecture and transparency. Through this exploration in a two-dimensional format the artist gains a sense of satisfaction in creating works of art with paper and also in generating ideas and concepts for future textile pieces.

This drawing is an important piece in terms of the artist's development. This piece embodies the feedback and encouragement received from independent work in painting classes taken with Sheila Wells and Ed Miller.

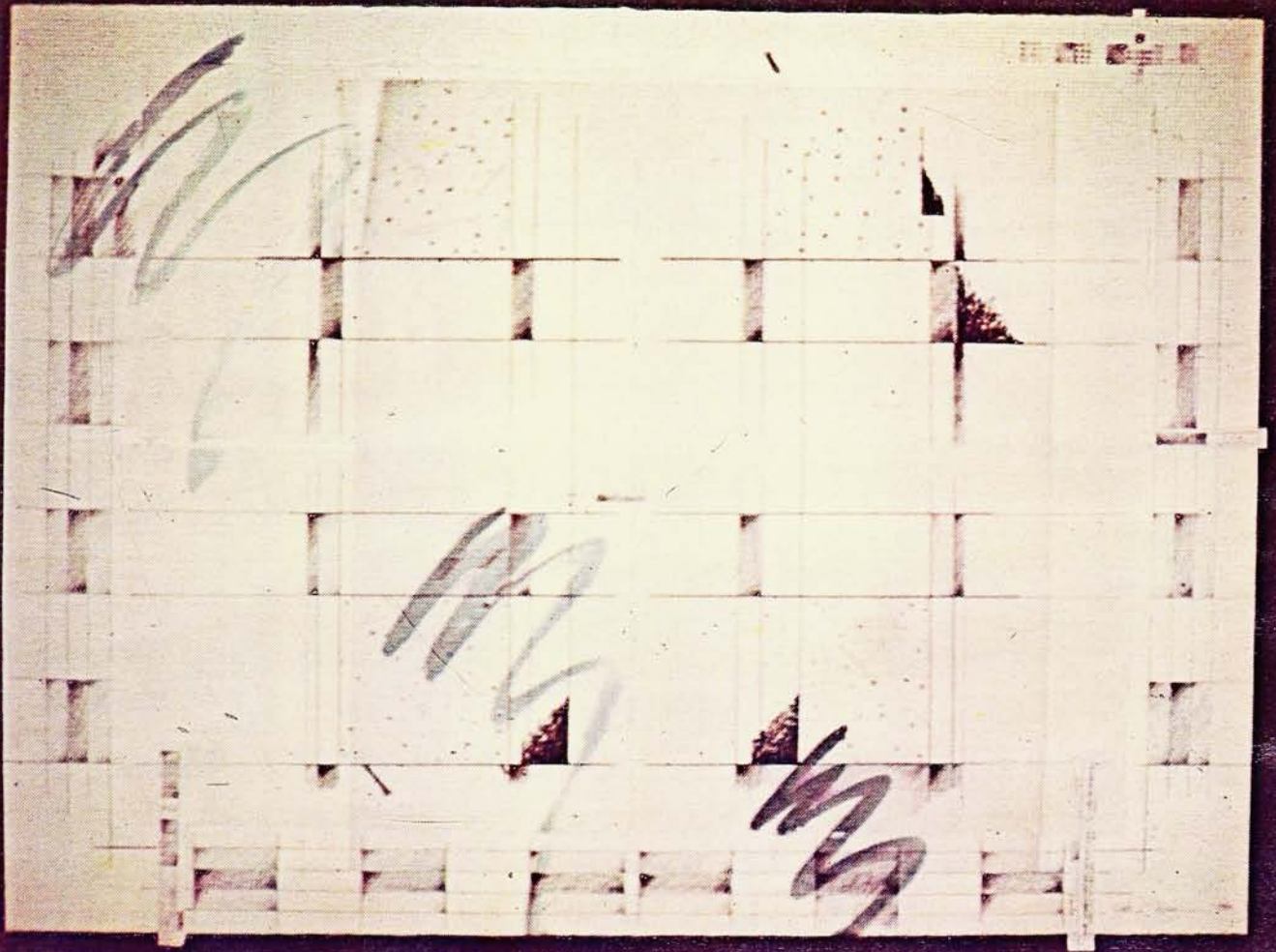


Fig. 8. Foreign Language Series

CONCLUSION ABOUT ARTIST'S BODY OF WORK

The artist considers the completion of her thesis body of work as the beginning of her exploration of the use of dyes on fiber. While working on these six pieces she began to design and visualize variations on each piece. Often, the hours spent hemming and finishing pieces were put to use in devising new formats and approaches to continue this series.

The artist would like to continue combining other materials with fibers, such as wood, plexiglass, metal, paper, and paint. The use of these materials could further enhance the illusion of depth that is implied in each piece. These materials would provide an exciting addition in terms of adding another layer in space, as well as an unexpected texture or color. The artist is aware that care would have to be taken to make sure that these nonfiber materials would not overpower the total design statement of the piece. Illusions are fragile and are easily destroyed.

In conclusion, the artist realizes that in her thesis work there appear to be layers of space suggested. These levels seem to occur consciously, one, then the next, and perhaps a third level is constructed. She feels in future works some deliberate connections between the layers would also be appropriate, and would in the end create a more exciting visual illusion and message. The artist will further explore the presentation of textile and mixed media pieces, and she would like to continue to successfully integrate the presentation methods into the final installation of the finished piece.

Dye Imagery

The artist considers herself a painter who employs textile techniques. She often uses dyes to paint on the warp ends. This use of dye has a certain fluidity in design, yet this is contrasted with the woven grid or window structure which is superimposed over the painted surface. The artist employs the dyes as well as various fibers and other materials to create images which offer the viewer a window into a color field.

The artist's work relates to painting and papermaking courses taken as minor and elective courses in the M.F.A. degree program. These courses allowed her the opportunity to explore color and design concepts and, then, to bring some of this experimentation to compliment textile processes.

Many different ideas can be generated on paper in a short amount of time. The artist enjoys this spontaneity and freedom of working with collage and drawing--the erasing, adding, and then taking away again, versus the textile processes which require large amounts of time and energy. There are few opportunities for last minute changes in design in the weaving process. Once the warp has been selected as well as the sett, width, length, and threading, there remain few changes for the artist to make.

The artist enjoys the relationship that is created because of the time involvement necessary to complete a woven piece. Therefore, a certain precious quality is created because of this commitment of time and energy. The viewer can see the intimate interaction between the artist and the materials that was necessary to create the complete visual statement.

It is the artist's hope that the viewer will go beyond perceiving the work in terms of techniques, processes and the time element and consider the work as a total statement. Finally, the artist feels her work moves beyond textile techniques and relates strongly to her background in painting, drawing, and art history, suggesting references that transcend the more formal fiber/cloth connotations.

Footnotes

¹Robert Motherwell, "The Humanism of Abstraction", Lecture at Saint Paul's School, Concord, N.H., Tracks: A Journal of Artist's Writings, vol. II, no. 1 (November, 1974), p. 12.

²H. E. Beckett and J. E. Godfries, Windows (N.Y., Cincinnati: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1974), p. 140.

³Bernard Rudofsky, The Prodigious Builders (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 309.

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